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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [IR](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: GOI BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ON M/V FRANCO

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a carefully orchestrated public relations event on November 5, the GOI briefed ambassadors, defense attaches and members of the diplomatic corps at the Nahal Soreq Ammunition Center on the arms shipment confiscated from the M/V Francop. Participants, including polmiloff, were able to observe most of the seized munitions, including 122mm and 107mm rockets, which had been hidden in containers behind bags of polyethylene plastic. The GOI provided a copy of the M/V Francop's shipping manifest, which noted the shipment's origin in Bandar Abbas via the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL), and final destination in Latakia, Syria. During a subsequent presentation, IDF officers noted that many munitions crates were either stamped "IRISL" or included documentation marked with what they claim was the IRGC Quds Force logo. GOI officials made the case that Iran continues to violate UNSCRs 1747 and 1803 -- and put less emphasis on 1701. They called for the international community to take action in thwarting Iranian efforts to arm terrorist organizations in the region, while focusing less attention on Israeli attempts to protect its citizens via self-defense. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The GOI loaded members of the diplomatic community on to two large tour buses and drove them to an arms depot inside the Nahal Soreq Ammunition Center November 5. Upon arrival at the depot, several still photographers and camera crews filmed the diplomats and military attaches as they examined several outside displays of munitions reportedly seized from the M/V Francop. The displays included an example of the munitions, plus a placard with information regarding the munitions' dimensions and origin -- in all cases, the placards claimed the munitions were manufactured in Iran. Also on display were several shipping containers from the M/V Francop, demonstrating how the munitions had been packed behind large bags of polyethylene plastic.

¶3. (C) Along the walls of the entrance to the depot were several large posters displaying additional information on the M/V Francop, as well as earlier interdicted ships, the Monchegorsk and the Hansa India. One poster depicted the shipping route of the Iranian ship M/V Visea, which left Bandar Abbas with the arms shipment sometime in October and unloaded the shipment in the Egyptian port of Damietta on October 26 -- after which the M/V Francop took the shipment on board. The M/V Francop's shipping manifest also was displayed, in which it clearly shows the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) in Bandar Abbas as the shipment's origin, with Latakia, Syria, as the "place of delivery." The shipping manifest also claimed the cargo consisted of 24,228 bags of polyethylene. MFA Deputy Director for Strategic Affairs Alon Bar told polmiloff that the shipping manifest would play a key role in Israeli attempts to make its case at the United Nations.

¶4. (SBU) The diplomatic community was then invited inside the depot, where 70 percent of the confiscated munitions was on display in crates. According to the IDF depot commander, 30

percent of the munitions was determined "not safe" and therefore stored in a separate, secure location. Munitions were found in 36 of the shipment's 400 containers; the age of the munitions was split between those manufactured in 2009, and those in the 1990s. A preliminary count of rockets and munitions included:

- 2,125 107mm "Katyusha" rockets
- 690 122mm "Grad 20" rockets
- 685 rocket fuses
- 5,680 60mm mortar shells
- 2,316 81mm mortar shells
- 774 120mm mortar shells
- 3,046 106 mm recoilless rifle cartridges
- 20,100 fragment grenades (F1)
- 566,220 7.62mm bullets

15. (C) Following the depot visit, MFA Director General Yossi Gal led a briefing team discussing the ramifications of the arms shipment. He characterized the shipment as a "pleasant surprise," one in which naysayers could not possibly "argue with fact." Gal emphasized that this shipment is the type of activity that Iran and its terrorist proxies Hamas and Hizballah conduct on a daily basis in the region.

16. (C) Israel Defense Intelligence (IDI) COL Shahar Levi characterized the M/V Francop arms shipment as indicative of Iran's highly sophisticated and multidimensional campaign to arm radical forces in the region. He briefed on the recent Hamas rocket test, which the IDF suspects was an Iranian Fajr-5 with a range over 60 km. COL Levi reviewed Iranian land, sea and air smuggling routes in the region, focusing on

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Iranian attempts to use commercial shipping companies -- as indicated by earlier arms shipments on board the Monchegorsk and Hansa India.

17. (C) In terms of evidence, COL Levi said the IDF discovered documentation labeled "Sepah" and emblazoned with a logo of a raised fist holding a rifle in most of the munitions crates discovered on the M/V Francop, while some crates were stamped "IRISL." COL Levi explained that the Sepah was a branch of the Iranian military -- the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution -- while the logo was often used by the IRGC's Quds Force. Members of the diplomatic corps were shown pictures of the logo, but not the actual documentation with the logo allegedly found in the munitions crates. Finally, COL Levi claimed that Hizballah is the only known entity in the region to use 106mm rifles, thereby presenting another strong argument that the cartridges confiscated from the M/V Francop were intended for Hizballah.

18. (C) Deputy Commander of the Israel Navy Rear Admiral Rani Ben Yehuda provided an operational brief on the M/V Francop interdiction, noting that the ship was stopped approximately 100 miles from shore. He explained that the Israel Navy often questions ships coming through the Suez Canal, and noted that other forces in the region such as UNIFIL and NATO's Operation Active Endeavor also question ships in the same manner. RADM Ben Yehuda said the Israel Navy boarded the M/V Francop without the use of force, describing the ship's Polish captain and Ukrainian crew as very cooperative.

He said the shipping manifest raised suspicions (IRISL, Bandar Abbas as port of origin, Latakia as final destination), and asked the captain's permission to open one of the ship's containers, which included munitions camouflaged by a layer of polyethylene bags.

19. (C) RADM Ben Yehuda said the GOI then coordinated with Antigua (M/V Francop's flag country) and Cyprus (parent shipping company), and asked the captain to divert the ship to the Israeli port of Ashdod. RADM Ben Yehuda said the captain fully cooperated during the operation; the GOI believes the captain and crew did not know what the shipment contained, and subsequently released the ship and crew after

unloading its cargo. He argued that the shipment represents a clear violation of UNSCRs 1747 and 1803, and questioned how many other international shipping companies have fallen victim to Iranian efforts to transfer weapons to Hizballah and Hamas.

¶10. (C) IDF J5 Head of the Strategic Division BG Yossi Heymann briefed on the strategic implications of the M/V Francop arms shipment. He argued that Iran and Syria continue to employ a strategy of destabilization in weak states such as Lebanon and Iraq, using commercial/civilian platforms while systematically violating UNSCRs 1701, 1747, and 1803. BG Heymann highlighted recent rockets fired from Lebanon, including a 122mm rocket on July 14, and a 107mm rocket on October 27 -- the same types of rockets found on the M/V Francop. He called for better cooperation from the international community, including the use of operational tools such as NATO OAE and CTF 1501/151, as well as sharing intelligence, and examining and bolstering the existing legal framework.

¶11. (C) MFA DG Gal closed the brief, noting that the shipment represents "proof" of Iran's on-going arms-supply relationship with Hamas and Hizballah. He noted that the confiscated arms shipment was the largest ever by Israel -- the almost 3,000 rockets on-board the M/V Francop nearly equaled the 4,000 total rockets launched by Hizballah during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Gal called on all "responsible members" of the international community to take measures to prevent Iranian defiance of the Security Council's resolutions. He stressed that the GOI will continue to take steps to protect its citizens, questioning what "responsible" country would not take action in self-defense. Finally, Gal said more attention in the United Nations should be focused on the real threat -- Iran -- rather than on Israel's attempts to protect its citizens (Note: While not explicitly stated, Gal clearly was referring to the United Nation's focus on the Goldstone Report.).

CUNNINGHAM